

MINUTES

NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

SPECIAL MEETING

March 30, 2009

Mayor Wright called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM in the Council Chambers of the Newington Town Hall.

I PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II ROLL CALL

Councilors Present

Councilor Banach
Councilor Boni
Councilor Bottalico
Councilor Bowen
Councilor Cohen
Councilor Lenares
Councilor Nagel
Councilor Nasinnyk
Mayor Wright

Staff Present

Town Manager Salomone
Lori Verreault, Executive Assistant
Ann Harter, Finance Director
Lisa Rydecki, Deputy Finance Director

Deputy Mayor Lenares moved to amend the agenda to allow Councilors to make remarks prior to public participation. Motion seconded by Councilor Boni. Motion passed 9-0.

Deputy Mayor Lenares stated that the Council has heard the needs of the Board of Education and of the people of the Town and indicated that the Council will honor the Town Manager's requested three-percent budget increase for the Board of Education. He stated that this was a very difficult budget process for both parties and even in these economic times and with layoffs in surrounding towns there will not be any layoffs in the Town of Newington. Deputy Mayor Lenares stated that Newington is a leader, not a follower in the education department. He thanked both parties of the Town Council, the Board, the department heads and members of the AFSCME union for coming together to work this out.

Councilor Boni commended the Town Manager and all those that assisted him for a fine job in preparing the 2009-2010 budget. He remarked that this budget was more difficult to prepare than others were due to the fact that we are in the worst economic times since the Great Depression. He commended the Board of Education for finding a way to submit a request that is limited to a three-percent increase which will eliminate layoffs and program cuts. Councilor Boni remarked that while he's sure everyone wishes there was more money available he is confident that this proposed budget will serve the Town well and still keep taxes to a minimum. He thanked AFSCME members for approving a voluntary wage freeze for the upcoming year and for being part of the solution.

Councilor Nagel stated that he intends to vote in favor of the most recent Town Manager's adjusted budget including the Board of Education's three-percent budget proposal. He remarked that during these difficult economic times when surrounding towns have had to present zero-increase budget proposals it is to the credit of all involved in the budget process that the presented Board increases are possible. He remarked that especially rewarding is the fact that this agreement eliminates any concerns about teacher layoffs and program reductions. He commended the Town management and the AFSCME union for selflessly agreeing to a wage freeze for this coming year, making this budget an easier one to achieve.

Councilor Nagel remarked that even though this budget may not cover everyone's wants it does demonstrate responsible spending without sacrificing the Town's quality services and education that Newington citizens expect. He stated appreciation for the endless hours, well-meaning inquiries and negotiations on the part of the Council and the Board and stated that passing this budget in its current form demonstrates the willingness of both political parties to put the community first.

Councilor Nasinnyk stated that she is amazed by the public turnout at the meeting, and commended the public for being a part of the budget process. She indicated that she is the Council's liaison to the Board of Education and noted that at its most recent meeting the Board had to make very difficult decisions about layoff and other cuts, and explained that the Board was responding to what it felt the Council was going to do the Board's budget. She stated that the Board had to make decisions for contractual reasons that required layoff notices to go out to the teachers by April 1. Councilor Nasinnyk stated that while she is very pleased to learn that the Council is in favor of recommending the proposed three-percent budget she noted that this is the first she has heard of this news. She stated that Newington is a leader in these tough times and is able to place an emphasis on what is important. She remarked that even with the cuts made to get to the three-percent budget the Town must be very responsible and conscious with the taxpayers' very precious tax dollars and she promised that the Council will try to do that in a very responsible manner.

Councilor Banach thanked the public for attending the meeting. He stated that he was unaware of what changed since the last meeting with the Council and the Board in which the Board members explained very forcefully that three-percent is as low as it could go on this budget; and he noted that there must have been further requests in the interim to cut the budget resulting in teachers receiving pink slips. He stated that he is unsure whether it's necessary to put people through these types of worries for something that the majority knew would end up at the three-percent. Councilor Banach remarked that he is unsure why there was a need for all of the political maneuvering.

Councilor Bowen noted that former Mayor Mortensen at one point gave the public an "F" grade for not participating in the budget process. He noted that he disagreed with the former Mayor's assessment at the time and stated that the public comes forward when it has a concern and he applauded the public for coming out this evening. He stated that some of the Councilors do not have prepared remarks because they are surprised about what happened at this meeting. He stated that he had heard the rumors, and has seen the pink slips and the Board of Education's letter and indicated that he had defended the letter because he felt that the Board had no other recourse as cuts to one-percent or less would have been devastating. He stated that people on the Council knew that people were going to show up at this meeting and they knew that what they were doing was not going to be supported or appreciated by those concerned about education and therefore they were forced to get together this weekend to figure something out. He applauded those that raised their voices to the Council.

Councilor Cohen stated that she did not have any idea about what anyone else on the Council was supporting, but stated that she could not have supported any further cuts to the Board. She stated that she does not believe that these were idle threats and stated that the Board has worked very hard to cut everything possible and that cutting further to get below the three-percent would have ruined the school system. Councilor Cohen remarked that she is glad that everyone else on the Council has come around to thinking that the proposed budget is right for the students and right for the Town. She noted that there is still more to be done on the rest of the budget and remarked that the Town Manager has done an excellent job of coming up with a budget that squeezes every drop possible from the funds and indicated that there will be additional non-Board of Education cuts that will lower the tax increase even further. She thanked the public for coming out and urged them to continue to participate in the process. Councilor Cohen also thanked the staff for all its hard work in the process.

Councilor Bottalico thanked the public for attending and thanked the Board of Education for coming to an agreement on the budget. He also thanked the Town Manager for his hard work. Councilor Bottalico indicated that the tax increase will come to about 2.6% this year. He cautioned, however, that next year will bring an even more difficult budget session and expressed hope that the economy will pick up in the meantime.

Mayor Wright thanked members of the public for coming out en masse. He stated that these difficult economic times call for leadership. He stated that the Board of Education has worked very hard to get down to a three-percent increase and to make the budget work within those confines. He stated that the Council will fund a three-percent increase to the Board's budget while keeping the tax increase at 2.6%. Mayor Wright remarked that it is a compromise between everyone and is a shared sacrifice for the Board and the Town. He stated that during these difficult times everyone must work together; something that is being demonstrated this evening. He stated that the Board has done a great job on the budget and stated that some of the key discussions in the compromise include some upcoming important studies that involve looking duplications in departments between the Town and the Board. He stated that the Town is going to hire consultants to determine whether there are possible long-term fundamental changes that will provide savings to the Town. He stated that there are no guarantees that these changes will go forward, but indicated that the Town is going to take a hard look at these issues. He thanked the Board for taking a position of leadership in agreeing to freeze wages for department heads. He stated that even though this has been a tough budget the Town is moving forward and taking a position of leadership in the State. He noted that there will not be any layoffs in the Town and thanked AFSCME for working with the Town to agree to no pay increases for next year.

III PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Dan Carson, 223 Little Brook Drive, Chair of the Board of Education: Mr. Carson expressed appreciation for the Council's support of the Board's budget request for a three-percent increase. He stated that the Board fully recognizes the Council's role and responsibly to weigh all aspects of the budget prior to approval. He stated that while the final vote has yet to be taken on the budget he is encouraged to see that the Council has had an open mind and has listened to how overwhelmingly the people of Newington continue to support excellence in education. Mr. Carson indicated that one week ago the Board reached out to the people asking that their voices be heard in the wake of possible budget cuts, layoffs, and program reductions and noted the public's response. He thanked those in attendance at the meeting for showing their incredible support and stated that it made a difference. Mr. Carson stated that the Town has been challenged to make sacrifices in order to make ends meet. He stated while attending meetings with other area community leaders he was struck by how many of those towns with little regard to education were on track to freeze educational spending for the upcoming year. He stated that it would have been easy for Newington's Council to follow a similar path, but instead the Council has prepared to take a position of leadership and fully support education in direct contrast to some surrounding communities. Mr. Carson stated that if the three-percent Board of Education budget is approved by the Council he intends to call a meeting of the Board that very evening, with the first item of business to authorize the Superintendent of Schools to take the proper steps to notify those who received layoff notices that they do have a position in the Newington school system. He thanked the Mayor, the Council and the people for believing in the Newington school system.

Beth DelBuono, 327 Walsh Avenue, Vice Chair of the Board of Education: Mrs. DelBuono thanked the Council for its opening comments and for its support of the Board's three-percent budget. She stated that the Board did a lot of work to get the budget to the three-percent and remarked that the going below three-percent would not have been attainable. She stated that she is grateful that the Council has decided to support the three-percent budget, which will insure that no staff members will be laid off. She stated that this is a tremendous accomplishment during these difficult economic times and considering that other area towns are resorting to layoffs. Mrs. DelBuono remarked that there was no political maneuvering by the Board and stated that the Board acted as it needed to in order to meet contractual obligations to notify teachers of any impending layoffs. She stated that the Board is thrilled to be able to rescind the layoff notices if the budget is passed as promised. She commended the Council for being able to deliver a budget within the financial restraints of the community while continuing to promote education. She thanked the Council for its efforts and for keeping an open dialogue with the Board. She thanked the members of public for attending and for making their voices heard.

Mayor Wright announced that the Fire Marshall has indicated that the room is over capacity. Discussion followed on how to proceed. Councilor Nagel moved to adjourn briefly. Motion seconded by Deputy Mayor Lenares. Motion passed 9-0. The meeting adjourned at 7:27pm and was called back to order at 7:37pm.

Meg Casasanta, 110 Steeplechase Drive. Board of Education Member: Mrs. Casasanta thanked the Town Council for keeping the Board's budget at a three-percent increase. She stated that Newington is a leader in education and remarked that an extraordinary amount of work went into the budget.

Nancy Petronio, 44 Centerwood Road, Board of Education Member: Mrs. Petronio stated that as a newer member of the Board this budget process was very difficult. She stated that the Board of Education worked various scenarios and the three-percent budget preserves services and allows education to keep moving forward. She stated that it will be necessary to buckle down in the next year or two and remarked that no district is better prepared for this than Newington. She thanked the Town Council for listening to the Board's needs.

Mary Niro, 148 Eagle Drive, Board of Education Member: Mrs. Niro thanked the Mayor and the Council for its efforts to reach a three-percent budget according to the recommendation of the Town Manager. She stated that this was a unified effort through the majority of the Board of Education and the Council, who worked tediously to come to a unanimous vote for all parties. She stated that the Council understands the Board's needs and indicated that no one wanted to see layoffs or program cuts. She stated that Newington is a great place to live because of the Council's dedication to the children.

Rosella Rizza, 212 Robin Brook Drive: Ms. Rizza thanked the Council for its efforts. She stated that she received a very valuable education in the Town and has been a teacher at Martin Kellogg Middle School since 1994. She stated that she has witnessed many changes in the educational system as it has created equal learning opportunities for a diverse learning population, developed competitive programs to challenge and enrich students and hired enthusiastic and energetic teachers. She stated that while times are difficult the Council's actions the children will not suffer and will not be deprived of valuable programs that have been developed to help them to succeed and lead us into the future. She stated that some students will continue to connect with the teachers that are the only positive influence in their lives. She stated that we live in a different time, but remarked that Newington has always had a sense of pride and has always been successful in moving with the times. Ms. Rizza stated that the schools have always been very competitive academically with other area towns and indicated that the taxpayers have chosen elected officials it believes has the citizens' and the children's' best interest in mind. She stated that those who have gone through the Newington school system have benefited from all the opportunities provided by the school and urged the elected officials to provide current students with the same opportunities. She stated that all students have the right to be in an educational system that is not void of essential programs and adequate staffing.

David Karpf, 55 Coles Avenue, Mr. Karpf indicated that he is a seventh-grade student at John Wallace Middle School. He stated that he participates in the gifted and talented program, the world language program and he hopes to participate in advanced placement programs once he reaches high school. He stated that the proposed budget cuts would eliminate the gifted and talented program and the advanced placement opportunities as well as the middle school foreign language program. He stated that the cuts could have also eliminated field trips, increased walking distances, reduced the nursing program, and reduced the health program, media services, counseling program, intramural sports, supplies, workbook and textbook purchases. He stated that these cuts would have affected everyone in the school system. Mr. Karpf remarked that this gutting of the public school system would have worsened the schooling system in Newington. He stated that these programs are necessary for many students and help to develop future life skills. He stated that advanced placement classes help students get into colleges and the Explore program helps students to excel and challenge themselves. He indicated that his advanced social studies class has just studied the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and he remarked that he appreciated the depth of the discussion and as a result he now understands his rights as a student and as a United States citizen. He stated that world language programs are very important in our ever-changing world and noted that being able to speak more than one language is a skill that is becoming more sought after by employers. He urged the Council not to cut the budget and not to change the education system.

Joan Laskowski, 10 Pebble Drive: Ms. Laskowski stated that she is a registered Republican who believes in being fiscally responsible. She stated that it is important to be careful that the decisions made today do not have a negative impact on the future of tomorrow. She stated that her children received an outstanding education in the Town and were well-prepared for college and remarked that she is sure

she's not the only person who moved into Town due to the excellent school system. She stated that the Town must always keep its standards high and not shortchange the students. She noted that there are two populations that need help the most: the children and the elderly and she thanked the Council for listening to the taxpayers and for putting the people first.

Michelle Saindon, 184 Kimberly Road: Ms. Saindon expressed gratitude towards the elected officials for responding to the community. She acknowledged that the upcoming year will be tough and stated that the Town needs to keep its education standards high. She stated that she does not support any increases in class size and stated that at-risk children will fall through the cracks if such increases occur. She stated that while the three-percent increase was great she hoped for an even greater increase and remarked that this type of spending is worth every penny.

Jamie Z and Abby R.: Jamie and Abby stated that they are sixth graders who came to speak about the Board of Education's budget. They said that they were glad to see that the Council has approved the Board's budget.

Mady Kenny, 53 Crestview Drive: Mrs. Kenny warned against using the children as political pawns. She noted that the Council is willing to accept the three-percent budget with two stipulations and inquired whether it would be willing to consider doing so with no stipulations. She noted that the capacity of the room was out of fire code compliance long before the Fire Marshall's arrival and stated that there is no reason why the Council could not have arranged to use the gym. She stated that it is a shame and stated that those who had to leave the meeting deserve an apology.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive: Ms. Lyons noted that former Mayor Mortensen gave the public an "F" for participation in the budget process, and she remarked that this most recent process has reaffirmed that she has neither the time nor the inclination to make informed decisions on the budget. She noted Councilor Bottalico's comments at the last meeting that he was appalled at the Board's recent letter to parents regarding what programs would have to be cut with a less than three-percent budget and she stated that the Chair of the Board would not have sent that letter without good reason. Ms. Lyons stated that she is proud that her daughter is a product of the Newington school systems.

Robert Briggaman, 75 Groveland Terrace: Mr. Briggaman indicated that he is speaking to the other side of the issue. He indicated that he watched the Board's presentation and was astounded by the Board's attitude and the fact that nothing was discussed in the spirit of compromise. He noted high levels of unemployment and the alarming rate of foreclosures in the State as well as the State's budget deficit and remarked that the Board's answer to this situation has been "business as usual". He questioned the Board's tactics of using children as pawns to scare parents. Mr. Briggaman suggested that a check off box be placed on property and motor vehicle tax bills... (Mayor Wright asked Mr. Briggaman to wrap up his remarks) Mr. Briggaman stated that the purpose would be to see who really cares about education spending.

Cindy Barron, 190 Kimberly Road: Ms. Barron stated that she is a long-time Newington resident. She stated that she attended a recent PTA meeting in which the 3.7% budget and what would be cut to get to the three-percent budget was discussed. She stated that teachers work tirelessly and are continually asked to do more for less. She stated that the schools are putting off textbook and computer purchases and noted that once spending for an item or program is cut it never comes back. She stated that teachers are doing everything they can but they cannot do it without the proper tools. Ms. Barron stated that while it is important to recognize these difficult times it is also important to invest in education to keep Newington moving forward.

Judy Igielski, 23 Old Musket Drive: Ms. Igielski noted that she has been a Newington resident since 1972 and served on the Board of Education from 1991 – 1999. She stated that she knows what it is like to give layoff notices – it's heart wrenching. She stated that it was unsettling to learn of the negotiations behind the scenes and to hear that a deal had been made. She noted that there were many young people who had planned and prepared to speak at this meeting and for them to basically be asked to leave is wrong. She stated that people have the right to be heard. Ms. Igielski noted the search for a new Superintendent of Schools and stated that the Town needs someone competent. She requested that the Council fund the Board's budget at the requested level without any "deals". She thanked Councilors Bowen, Banach and

Nasinnyk as well as Town Manager Salomone for attending a focus group meeting about the Superintendent search and stated disappointment that the Mayor and majority party members did not attend.

Don Woods, 82 Ivy Lane: Mr. Woods indicated that he serves on the Board of Parks and Recreations. Mr. Woods expressed concern with closing Town buildings in the evenings, stating that doing so will affect many programs including youth basketball, travel basketball, the Newington Skyhawks, introductory sports programs, adult volleyball, Special Olympic programs and more. He stated that if the Senior Center or other buildings were to close in the evenings then Parks and Recreations will be forced to review programs. He stated that there are only so many hours available and not enough resources.

Ms. Evon (Name not audible on tape): Ms. Evon remarked that people came out to this meeting for a reason – that education is important. She indicated that she moved to Newington in 2000 due to its education system. She stated that rather than asking people to leave, the Council should have made an effort to relocate the meeting to a location that would have allowed everyone to participate.

Mary Udice, 26 Dalewood Road: Mrs. Udice noted that the Council claims to want residents to be empowered, to attend meeting and to voice concerns. She indicated that she attended the March 24, 2009 Council meeting and after speaking for less than two minutes of her three-minute allotment she was interrupted by the Mayor, told she was out of time and told she was out of order and she stated that she hopes that she will be allowed to speak without being interrupted at this meeting. She stated that as a Special Education Assistant she has witnessed first-hand the compassionate and dedicated teachers, administrators, assistants and various other staff who work hard each day to be certain that the children receive the best education that they are entitled to. She noted that the proposed tax increase, based on an average assessment on a single-family house, would cost the average taxpayer \$137 per year, or less \$0.30 per day or \$11.40 per month and inquired what the tax increase would have been had the Board's requested 3.7% increase been funded. She inquired why the Council is choosing to rip the Board's budget to shreds and she stated that the Town could have afforded an increase that only comes to a few more dollars when it is divided by all of the homes and businesses in Town. Mrs. Udice stated that the Town should not go backwards when it comes to education. She stated that education has made, and continues to make the Town what it is today. Mrs. Udice stated that the preceding comments were what she originally wrote for the March 24 Council meeting, and she then thanked the Council for finding a compromise with the three-percent budget.

Charles Shooshan, 60 Clifford Street: Mr. Shooshan stated that he wears the hats of an educator, a parent and an attorney. He stated that he is a certified teacher in mathematics and health education and noted that health education was an area that was on the list of possible cuts. He stated that when there are difficult choices it is important to make the best decisions possible, and while those approving the budget may have felt that it is ok to cut health education, in reality anything cut is a loss and he stated that health education is something everyone needs for the 21st century. Mr. Shooshan stated that his eight year old son currently receives special educational services in Town and remarked that his son has a successful future ahead due to the quality of special education services in the Town. He stated that no amount of money justifies cutting those programs. Mr. Shooshan stated that he believes the Charter revision with the budget referendum failed because the people believe they can trust the elected officials. He urged the Council to earn that trust and to make responsible decisions.

Peter Arbur, 133 Tremont Street: Mr. Arbur indicated that he had posed a number of questions to the Council during the last Public Hearing and noted that he has not received any response to those questions. Mr. Arbur stated that he learned from the Finance Director's office that one reason that the Council was able to achieve a 2.6% increase was due to the application of a \$2,000,000 surplus to the budget. He stated that the increase would be 5.1% without the benefit of that surplus. He cautioned that there may not be such a surplus available next year and indicated that the Town may be forced to start the next budget year in a deficit.

Christina Redman, 209 Sterling Drive: Ms. Redman stated that a Board of Education budget of less than three-percent will undermine education and urged the Council to give the students the tools to obtain the skills they need to succeed.

Sonya Casarotto, 187 Eddy Lane: Mrs. Casarotto thanked the Council for its support of the three-percent Board budget. She noted that many people who grew up in her neighborhood have come back to the Town to raise their own families. She noted that per-pupil spending is lower in Town than in other comparable towns and remarked that Newington makes every penny count. She stated that her five children cover a wide spectrum of learning needs and indicated that she has been very pleased with the quality of life in Town. Mrs. Casarotto stated that education programs are not expendable and are critical for the future of the Town. She urged the Town to continue, if not improve, education standards for the good of the community.

Nick Bloomquist, 30 Harding Avenue: Nick indicated that he is a freshman at Newington High School. He remarked that the Town is breathing a sign of relief regarding the Board's budget and he thanked the Town for not making education a political issue. He stated that cuts made to programs, increased fees, increased class sizes and reduced purchases of computers and materials would have set the education system backwards.

Jacqueline Campbell, 58 High Ridge Drive: Ms. Campbell indicated that her children attended Newington schools. She stated that she still supports Dr. Perlini's requested 3.7% budget increase. She stated that she has faith that the 3.7% increase is what the schools need. She indicated that the 3.7% increase boils down to about \$391,000 and inquired why the \$700,000 budgeted for Town Hall improvements can't wait, and why \$391,000 can't be moved from the capital improvements budget to the schools.

Brett Goldstein, 43 Moreland Avenue: Mr. Goldstein urged the Council to make Newington a Town worth living in and a place where families, seniors and people want to be. He stated that if people want to be here then there will be a tax base which will solve what that Town needs. He stated that he has lived in Town for eleven years and remarked that his sons are getting a wonderful education, the Parks and Recreations department has great programs and the Library is second to none. He urged the Council to look beyond the next election and to look to the future of Newington and to make it a place worth living. Mr. Goldstein stated that while he does not advocate an open checkbook he is willing to pay increased taxes in order to keep Newington a Town worth living in.

Sara Tamborello, 55 Wilbur Drive: Ms. Tamborello stated that the education she received as a graduate of the Newington school system has provided her with invaluable experience in her pursuit of higher education. She stated that as she looked to purchase a home she chose to raise a family in the community that has served her well. She stated that it is due, in part, to the value the Town places on education that property values continue to grow, relatively speaking, in comparison to other area towns. Ms. Tamborello stated that she is a teacher in an area school district and has witnessed that town's budget go to referendum year after year, with the taxpayers associations continually winning out over education. She stated that such short-sightedness has caused the community to lose out and educational programs to be cut, resulting in increased class size, students having less contact with teachers and facility stretched beyond its breaking point. She stated that the result is lower property taxes in a divisive town divided by politics rather than united by common values. She remarked that she would hate to see this fate fall upon Newington.

Mathew Mazzoccoli, 149 Harris Drive: Mr. Mazzoccoli stated that he is a registered Republican an active voter. He stated that he was concerned about programs in the schools that were under consideration of being cut, specifically the SRO position. He stated that this position cannot be duplicated by teachers or social workers and remarked that there is a unique relationship between students and the SRO. He stated that teachers don't have the time to speak to students who are experiencing problems due to drugs or alcohol or to students whose families are suffering due to the failing economy. He stated that SROs do much more than just law enforcement and he stated that he supports the SRO position and urged the Council to keep its promise to support the three-percent budget.

Clark Castelle, 167 Connecticut Avenue: Mr. Castelle thanked the Mayor and the majority members of the Town Council for approving the three-percent Board of Education budget increase. He stated that while watching the Board's meeting on March 25 he was incredulous to observe the Board members' anxiety and concern turn into the deepest despair. He remarked that this was probably nothing compared to the despair felt by those who received layoff notices. He stated that his colleagues in the schools were shell-shocked by the twenty-four termination notices. Mr. Castelle stated that with a bit of compassion

and a line of communication from the Mayor to the Chair of the Board all of this could have been avoided. He indicated that several speakers have warned that next year will be even more difficult and he stated hope that the line of communication will be more open and in the end the Town Council will follow the example set by the Board's unanimous decision.

Jeff Hedberg, 120 Northwood Road: Mr. Hedberg noted that the proposed budget is tentative and has not yet been approved by the Council. He explained the budget process and stated that there were no secret deals. He stated that he wishes that the pink slips could have waited to go out until after any vote on the Board's budget. He indicated that there is a Public Hearing on the budget on Monday 4-6-09 and the Council's vote on the budget is on Tuesday 4-14-09. He thanked the Council and the Board for its efforts.

Charlene Coan, 270 East Robbins Avenue: Mrs. Coan stated that she is a PTO member and she is glad that the Council intends to accept the three-percent budget.

Melissa Mulcahy, 215 Lowery Place: Ms. Mulcahy stated that she read a statistic that Newington High School ranks 73rd in the state and remarked that she hopes that this spending helps to raise that ranking.

Carolyn Moore, 58 Cambria Avenue: Ms. Moore thanked the Council and the Board for not letting politics get in the way of education.

Mitch Page: 46 Olive Street: Mr. Page noted proposed studies regarding the possibility of privatizing bussing. He expressed concerns over the safety of using private companies for transporting students and urged the Council to hold a public discussion on the issue.

Jennifer Rodriguez, 71 Northwood Road: Ms. Rodriguez thanked the Council and Board for its hard work.

Derek Bloomquist, 1620 Main Street: Mr. Bloomquist stated that he is a junior at NHS. He stated that he was alarmed by proposed cuts to vital programs at the schools, including the proposal to eliminate the foreign language program in the middle schools. He stated that the program is already inferior, not due to the teachers but due to the fact that the program only runs for half a year, resulting in some students going an entire year without foreign language instruction. He stated that foreign language studies should begin at a younger age and should encompass the entire school year. Mr. Bloomquist stated that to even consider eliminating essential programs such as remedial reading and AP classes is wrong and stated that education is more than rote learning.

Bill Lichota, 30 Hillside Street: Mr. Lichota stated that the process has energized him and has motivated him to speak at a meeting for the first time. He stated that he moved to Town about ten years ago due to its perceived convenience and valuable education system. He stated that he has been satisfied that he gets his money's worth with his tax dollars. He stated that the schools are performing despite the economic times and indicated that performance is based on perceptions as well as on numbers. He applauded the Town Council for approving the Board's three-percent budget.

IV CONSIDERATION OF OLD BUSINESS

A Appointment of Town Treasurer

Deputy Mayor Lenares moved the following:

RESOLVED:

That the Newington Town Council hereby makes the following appointment:

Deputy Treasurer

Name	Address	Party	Term	Replaces
John L. Salomone	16 Judge Lane Newington	U	ASAP-11/13/09	Cherie Woods (res. 3-31-09)

Motion seconded by Councilor Boni.

Town Manager Salomone stated that the Treasurer position will remain vacant, and stated that he will resume the roll of Deputy Treasurer, which will fulfill the requirement of filling the vacancy by March 31. Councilor Bowen inquired whether there is any precedent to this appointment. Town Manager Salomone replied that while it has not happened to his knowledge in Newington he did have a similar experience in Watertown. Mayor Wright stated that this is a great step for the Town. He stated that the Treasurer position has historically been a political appointment and leaving the position vacant and eliminating the pay associated with the duties will save the Town about \$5,000 per year.

Motion passed 9-0.

V CONSIDERATION OF NEW BUSINESS

A Set Tentative Budget

Deputy Mayor Lenares moved all of the adjustments on the attached list which also reflects the votes taken on each item. Items 1-3 were seconded by Councilor Bowen; Items 4, 6, 7, 12, 13, 24 and 26 by Councilor Boni; Items 5, 8, 10, 14, 15, 17-23, 25, 27-33 by Councilor Bottalico; Items 9 and 16 by Councilor Nagel; Item 11 by Councilor Nasinnyk. Discussion on individual items is included below.

Discussion: Reduce Police Cruisers

Councilor Bowen explained that since one of the cruisers was received late in the year there is no need to purchase the one additional cruiser this year.

Discussion: Board of Education and Town consolidation Study

Councilor Cohen inquired whether the Board had agreed to the consolidation studies. Mayor Wright replied in the affirmative. Councilor Bowen stated that although no cost savings are guaranteed the studies are very important.

Discussion: Reduce NHS Code Compliance

Councilor Nasinnyk indicated that this is slightly more than half of this budget being reduced. She inquired whether the State will still reimburse the Town at a rate of 55% for the code compliance work. Town Manager Salomone replied in the affirmative. Councilor Nasinnyk stated that the Town can spend \$400,000 but with a 55% reimbursement rate it would get more than \$400,000 worth of work. Councilor Bowen clarified that with the reimbursement the Town can do \$400,000 worth of work at a cost of less than \$400,000. He stated that there is a chance that the reimbursement may not be available in the future due to State budget concerns. He stated that he would rather have the grants locked in place when half of the work will be paid for by the State. He stated that by cutting back now there is a risk in the future that the taxpayers will fund more of the bill. Councilor Cohen stated that the Town has to be done with the work before getting the reimbursement. Councilor Nagel indicated that the projects will not be finished this tax year, and stated that this is an ongoing process. Town Manager Salomone stated that the project Committee did select an architect to be approved by the Council which will hopefully fast track the project.

Discussion: Increase Road Fund

Councilor Bowen stated that this is an account that can be reduced to fund the \$451,000 in the NHS Code Compliance project. He stated that Highway Department indicated a couple of years ago that it was comfortable with having approximately \$750,000 spent per year for road repair. He stated that he is in favor of putting money into the roads, especially with the current lower price of asphalt, but stated that \$151,000 can be removed from this item and the Town will still be spending over 1,000,000 in roads and still get more done than the Highway Department had requested. He stated that placing the money back into code compliance will save taxpayers a ton of money in the future. Councilor Nasinnyk stated that she was on the CIP during a previous Council term and inquired whether these decisions were made at the Committee level. Mayor Wright replied that there was not a final decision from the CIP Committee, and stated that the CIP has not met since the Town Manager's proposed budget was put together and stated that the changes were discussed during caucus. Councilor Bowen indicated that there was a

request for a CIP meeting last week, and the Chair of the Committee had said no and indicated that the Chair had told him that the Mayor felt there was no need for a meeting. Councilor Bowen indicated that the CIP made some recommendations about a month ago and had decided at that time that it would meet again to discuss these issues once it knew where the budget was. He noted that the request to meet again was denied. Councilor Cohen inquired how much is planned for the CIP in the upcoming year from Town funds. Town Manager Salomone replied that the Town Manager's budget originally contained \$300,000 plus LOSEP and grant funding.

Discussion: Restore Portion of Municipal Parking Lot

Councilor Banach stated that the wording should be "add" as there is nothing being restored. He stated that the Committee had previously made it clear that there would not be any additional spending above the \$1 million grant. He inquired whose decision it was to add this item. Mayor Wright replied that the original estimate for the downtown project from the Town Planner was \$1.8 million and noted that the Town has received \$1 million from the State. He explained that the additional is to chip away at the \$1.8 million in order to complete at least a couple of phases of the parking lot. Councilor Banach stated that the \$300,000 would be better spent in another area, and remarked that \$1 million should be plenty to renovate the parking lot. Councilor Nasinnyk noted that the Town received a \$1 million grant for the parking lot unbeknownst to the rest of the Council, and she was fine with spending the grant money to improve the lot, but she remarked that it would be better to put the money back into the Board of Education's budget or back into the school code compliance project. She stated that she cannot, in good conscience, use people's tax dollars in this manner during these economic times.

Councilor Cohen stated that other than in discussions for the State grant after the fact this project has never actually come before the Council for approval and the Council has not even discussed the project. Mayor Wright replied that the Downtown Revitalization Committee is moving the project forward and will come to the Council for approval of the plans. Councilor Cohen stated that it is not appropriate to fund a project that has not yet been considered by the Council. Councilor Bowen concurred with Councilors Banach, Cohen and Nasinnyk. He stated that the normal project process was not followed in this case and remarked that the Council is being asked to pay for something it has not even seen. Councilor Bowen stated that embedded in the \$1.8 million dollars is a piece of property that the Town wishes to purchase. He stated that for most of the year the lot is not even half full, yet the plans for the project call for the lot to be brought from 400 to 600 spaces with a small park in the middle. He indicated that there have been problems with the original designs and noted that he does not believe that the Parks and Recreation Department was ever consulted as to whether it can afford to maintain another park. Councilor Bowen stated that the owner of the aforementioned parcel has indicated that he does not wish to sell; therefore the Town is looking to take it by eminent domain. Councilor Bowen stated that eminent domain has its purpose when a town really needs a piece of property, but stated that he is unsure whether this is really a valid need to use eminent domain. Councilor Bowen noted that AFSCME members were asked to give up raises this year and noted that the amount saved by doing so is about \$300,000. He noted that Board of Education and Town administrators are also giving up their raises as well. Councilor Bowen stated that there are a litany of things that were cut to bring in a low budget and the intent was to spend only what is necessary. He requested to keep the CIP budget at \$6.3 to move the Town forward. He stated that it is important to make repairs to the roads and to the Town Hall and it is important to address code compliance at the schools but it is not important to spend an additional \$300,000 on top of a million dollars for a parking lot.

Mayor Wright stated that it is about economic development and laying down the foundation of revitalization for the community. He stated that it is not a new idea and although there is so much potential in the area, no one has seized that potential. He indicated that the Town Planner had estimated that it would cost about \$1.8 million to improve the area. Mayor Wright stated that the same dollars are being kept in the CIP with a small portion, \$300,000, to be allocated to the project. He indicated that this idea has come up many times by both the Republicans and Democrats, and listed thirteen studies authorized by the Council on the area from 1976 – 2009. He stated that after thirty-three years of study it's time to invest in the future of the downtown area. He noted that previous spending was given to private business owners to improve their facades, and stated that all of the funds for this project will go towards infrastructure rather than for private development. He remarked that it is time to move forward and make an investment in the Town's heart and soul.

Councilor Banach stated that a more prudent way to invest would be to limit the spending to the million dollars on improvements and if they do help to revitalize the area then the Town moves from there. Councilor Nasinnyk noted that the Town Manager did an outstanding job of creating a budget that comes in at three-percent and noted that he extended the Town's municipal budget to come in at a zero-percent increase. She stated that the Committee may have made decisions but stated that the Council has not approved of the project and noted that the CIP also has not met to make a decision as a group. She noted that the Republican caucus made the decision, which forces the Council to make a decision on something that the Mayor has unilaterally decided on because it's a project he believes in. She stated that the Mayor is just one vote among the nine Councilors and remarked that she is not swayed. Mayor Wright stated that the Council will have the vote on the item and noted that in representative government majority rules.

Councilor Bowen indicated that twelve of the previous studies mentioned by the Mayor were never acted upon and stated that the façade project gives great pleasure to those using the downtown area and stated that the Town got a great return from the money, especially given that the funds were not from taxpayers. He stated that the previous studies were not acted upon because the Council decided that the project was too expensive and voted not to proceed. He stated that while he likes the Town center he feels that the heart and soul of the Town is actually the schools. He stated that the Town budget is zero-percent, the Board budget has been cut from original proposed budget, and inquired how it is ok to fund the money for a parking lot. He noted that the CIP had unanimously agreed not to fund anything for the parking lot. He remarked that he doesn't understand the thought process and what changed to bring this about. He requested that the \$300,000 be reallocated back to the school code compliance project.

Councilor Cohen stated that the studies mentioned by the Mayor included not just the parking lot, but several areas surrounding the lot as well. She inquired whether deed restriction questions regarding donated land have been resolved. She stated that without a cost estimate no one knows what the \$1,000,000 will buy, or what the \$1.3 million will buy, and indicated that although the grant has been approved by the State the Town is yet to see the funding.

Councilor Banach requested that the motion be restated to change the word "restore" to "add". Deputy Mayor Lenares restated the motion as such.

VI PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Peter Arburr, 133 Tremont Street: Mr. Arburr inquired as to which Council meetings these discussions were held and decisions were made. He noted that the Town Manager placed \$300,000 for road repairs and stated that with the LOSEP the amount comes up to \$700,000 and inquired where the other \$300,000 of the million comes from.

Don Woods, 82 Ivy Lane: Mr. Woods stated that as a Board of Parks and Receptions he complained vigorously last year about the budget cuts and thanked the Council for the additional \$51, 000 in the upcoming budget. He noted that it will be wisely spent.

Pam Raynock, 118 Harding Avenue, Board of Education member: Mrs. Raynock thanked the people that came out to support the Board's budget. She noted that many speakers supported the Board's budget at three-percent with no strings and noted that she's heard from Townspeople of all political affiliations objections to the parking lot project, a few of whom went as far as to say that the Governor should have rescinded all beautification projects throughout the State in these tough economic times. She inquired how anyone could support spending an additional \$300,000 on a parking lot project.

Barbara Katzman, 5 Eckert Road: Mrs. Katzman stated that she was very upset to hear about the municipal parking lot and stated that now is hardly the time for the Town to worry about the parking lot. She stated that the recent facelift in the center worked and remarked that the center looks wonderful. She stated that a parking lot is hardly a necessity and will not improve anything. She stated that if the Town wants to improve the parking lot it can sweep it and clean it and perhaps plant some trees. Mrs. Katzman recommended allocating the \$300,000 towards the Board's budget for next year. She stated

that the project will not help attract people to the Town and it will not help with taxes. She stated opposition to the project and remarked that the lack of transparency has been disgraceful.

Steve Woods, 94 New Britain Avenue, Board of Education member: Mr. Woods noted that the size of the crowd was so strong and powerful that it got its message across before it said a single word. He indicated that he serves on the CIP and indicated that the Committee had decided not to spend any additional funds towards the parking lot project. He noted that this has obviously changed and stated that it is the prerogative of the majority to make the change even though it is obvious that the minority was not aware of such change. Mr. Woods stated that if there was a partnership between the Town and the landowners with both sides putting up money to invest in the property then the project would probably have public support. He stated that he is unsure why the public would support the project as it stands now and unsure how the project would improve the Town. Mr. Woods remarked that he cannot see the rationale of spending money on this project and stated that the money could be better spent in many other places.

Clark Castelle, 167 Connecticut Avenue: Mr. Castelle stated that the meeting has been a great lesson in municipal government. He noted that there was an argument presented by minority party Council members against adding the \$300,000 for the parking lot project that he felt was utterly persuasive, yet there was a 5-4 roll call vote as if the minority Councilors had never spoken. He stated that he hopes people were still watching.

Carol Anest, 30 Harding Avenue: Ms. Anest stated that she wished that the meeting had been moved to the Community Center in order to allow everyone to remain at the meeting and to hear all of the speakers that wished to speak. She noted that members of the majority party did not share their thoughts about why they voted in favor of adding \$300,000 to the parking lot fund and remarked that she would have liked to hear their thoughts on why they voted in that manner.

Robert Briggaman, 75 Groveland Terrace: Mr. Briggaman indicated that his comments are a continuation of his remarks during the first public participation portion of the agenda. He stated that he heard many comments that the Board needs more money and that the three-percent was really not enough, and he suggested that a check off box be placed on tax bills to allow citizens to designate a certain amount of their tax dollars to go towards education. He stated that this will reveal how many people are really willing to spend on education. He thanked the AFSCME union for seriously considering the needs of the Town and approving a wage freeze for the upcoming year, unlike their brothers and sisters of the other two unions in the Town. He thanked that Mayor and the Council for their hard work.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive: Ms. Lyons indicated that she attended the meeting of the Downtown Revitalization Committee and the Economic Development Commission and stated that she heard the Chair state that no more than one million dollars would be spent on the downtown revitalization. She noted that several members of the public wanted to know who is going to maintain the area. Ms. Lyons commented that there are already several parks that are not maintained as well as they should be and suggested that the Parks and Grounds Department could better use the \$300,000. She inquired whether the plans allow for emergency vehicles to get in and out of the area, and stated that it should not be up to five people on the Council to decide how to spend the \$300,000. She inquired how anyone can justify the \$300,000 for a parking lot when the Town Hall is falling down.

Jeanne McMahon, 17 Copper Beech Lane: Mrs. McMahon thanked the employees who gave up their raises so that fellow employees could keep their jobs and the community can keep up its level of programs and services. She thanked the Council for funding the Board's budget at three-percent. She stated that while she supports the concept of downtown revitalization she believes that the timing is an issue and remarked that the Town is acting irresponsibly to even accept the million dollar grant from the State. She stated that if Newington is truly a leader it would not accept the grant money. Mrs. McMahon stated that she is a registered Independent and stated that she is disappointed and concerned with the lack of communication and the fact that some Councilors are not voicing their opinions and appear to be simply following their party lines. She stated that these are very intelligent people and stated that she wants to hear from them in agreement or dissent. She stated that the same occurred during the Charter revision. She commented that the Republicans have earned their seats and have earned the majority position. She stated that while some great things have been done she would like to see communication utilized more effectively for the benefit of the community.

Marc Finkelstein, 272 Candlewood Drive, Board of Education member: Dr. Finkelstein thanked the Council for funding the Board's budget at three-percent and thanked the public for showing up and validating the Board's work in doing the right thing for the Town. He noted that he has had an office located on East Cedar Street that backs to the municipal parking lot since 1973. He stated that he has made it known that while renovations to the parking lot can be a worthwhile endeavor, unless there is some kind of attraction such as a chain restaurant to bring people to the center then there would be no reason for people to come to the center more so than they had been recently. He stated that he does not see how an additional \$300,000 would benefit the Town and stated that the funds would be better spent elsewhere.

VII REMARKS BY COUNCILORS

Councilor Nasinnyk remarked that it has been a long meeting, stated that it would have been nice to be a part of the Board of Education budget discussion before it appeared on the news, and noted that it was announced that the budget increase would be 2.6% prior to the Council even going over the list of adjustments. She also thanked Newington High School for its fantastic production of Superman, and remarked that it was uplifting in a time when the Town needed to be uplifted.

Councilor Bowen thanked the members of the public for attending, and also congratulated those involved in the NHS Superman production. He thanked the Chairman of the Board of Education for inviting him to a focus group to help choose the next Superintendent of Schools and remarked that the focus group meeting was very well-run. Councilor Bowen stated that this process has been democracy at work and stated that he has always believed that the most important elections are the local elections because they have the most impact in daily life. He stated that these meetings have the most impact on people's lives.

Councilor Bottalico urged people to take a walk through the downtown parking lot and commented that it is a terrible mess with broken curbs and sidewalks. He stated that it is Town property and it should be taken care of just like the roads.

Councilor Nagel thanked the members of the public for the turnout and their comments. He stated that he thinks of the downtown project as being a downtown revitalization and not just a parking lot. He stated that it is an investment in the Town and a way of bringing the community together while encouraging economic development. Councilor Nagel stated that he respects people's differences of opinion.

Councilor Boni stated that he is in favor of downtown revitalization and remarked that the term "parking lot" is a stigma that is not appropriate. He stated that he envisions a nice area for people to walk around with a nice chain restaurant with a patio. He noted that a new restaurant, The Hidden Vine, faces the lot. He stated that you have to start someplace in order to attract business and stated that the Town looks the same as it did fifty years ago.

Councilor Cohen thanked the people who came out and those who had to leave, and noted that it was too bad that the Council was not in a position to accommodate everyone who wished to be in attendance and participate. She stated that the people that had come to speak and still felt that their remarks were valid after the budget announcement should have been invited to stay and speak and remarked that a signup sheet was appropriate given the number of people wishing to speak. Councilor Cohen stated that people came in early and it was not right to ignore the names on the signup sheet. She noted that this is still a tentative budget and remarked that there are still three items to be reconsidered: the NHS code compliance project, the increase to the road fund and the parking lot project. She stated that there is still an upcoming Public Hearing and noted that the Council has until the final vote to make changes to the budget. She encouraged everyone with an opinion on the budget to attend and participate in the upcoming meetings. Councilor Cohen thanked Town Manager Salomone for initiating the negotiations with AFSCME and other employees.

Deputy Mayor Lenares thanked the Town Manager and the Finance Director for their hard work on the budget. He apologized to the members of the public who couldn't speak but indicated that it was the Fire Marshall's orders and out of the Council's control. He stated that if the Council had known there would be

five-hundred people in attendance it would have found a bigger venue. He stated that while he initially believed that \$1,000,000 would be sufficient to do the parking lot project, the parking lot is in terrible condition and is well overdue for an update. He stated that this is a good investment for the Town.

Mayor Wright stated that he is proud of the budget and of the Council and Board's hard work. He stated that he is glad that the Council was able to fund the Board at three-percent while keeping the tax increase at 2.6%. He noted that not a dollar was taken from the CIP budget. He stated that investments are made from a capital standpoint across the board, from the Board of Education to the roads to the 2010 revaluation, public safety, and sidewalks. Mayor Wright commented that the downtown revitalization project is a very important investment for the Town and is much more than just the back of buildings. He stated that everyone wants to see downtown be a place to shop, eat and congregate. He noted that the \$300,000 investment is matched by a \$1,000,000 State grant – a 3:1 ratio. He noted that there were thirteen studies done about this and stated that the twelve past studies prior to the current study likely cost the Town around a half-million dollars. Mayor Wright remarked that he is glad that the budget was accomplished without single layoff. He thanked the AFSCME members and he thanked all of the staff involved in the budget process.

VIII ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Bowen moved to adjourn at 10:29pm. Motion seconded by Deputy Mayor Lenares. Motion passed 9-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jaime Trevethan
Clerk of the Council

17	10191	8213	Delete cleaning contract due to night custodian being restored	(\$24,000)	9	0	73,241,992	28.47	2.85%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
18	10810	8220	Eliminate contractual services for special events	(\$20,000)	9	0	73,221,992	28.46	2.82%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
19	10810	8103	Create Part-time position for Special Events Coordinator	\$14,250	9	0	73,236,242	28.46	2.82%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
20	10930	8220	Reduce contribution to Greater Hartford Transit District	(\$879)	9	0	73,235,363	28.46	2.82%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
21	10943	8220	Use Police Special Duty Account to supplement retirement contribution	(\$220,546)	9	0	73,014,817	28.38	2.53%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
22	10944	8220	Adjust Social Security for above changes in personnel costs	\$4,119	9	0	73,018,936	28.38	2.53%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
23	10945	8220	Adjust Medicare for above changes in personnel costs	\$964	9	0	73,019,900	28.38	2.53%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
24	10195	8220	Board of Education and Town consolidation study	\$50,000	9	0	73,069,900	28.40	2.60%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
25	11100	8502	Reduce Town Hall Renovation	(\$100,000)	9	0	72,969,900	28.36	2.46%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
26	11100	8501	Increase Park & Playfield Improvements	\$51,000	9	0	73,020,900	28.38	2.53%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
27	11100	8502	Reduce NHS Code Compliance	(\$451,929)	5	4	72,568,971	28.20	1.88%	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	y
28	11100	8501	Eliminate Bus Garage Doors	(\$110,000)	9	0	72,458,971	28.16	1.73%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
29	11100	8502	Eliminate District Air Conditioning	(\$85,000)	9	0	72,373,971	28.13	1.63%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
30	11100	8501	Restore Sidewalk & Stonewall Repair	\$30,000	9	0	72,403,971	28.14	1.66%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
31	11100	8501	Increase Road Fund	\$485,929	5	4	72,889,900	28.33	2.35%	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	y
32	11100	8501	Restore portion of Municipal Parking Lot	\$300,000	5	4	73,189,900	28.45	2.78%	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	y
33	12500	8501	Reduce Equipment Reserve	(\$120,000)	9	0	73,069,900	28.40	2.60%	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
TOTAL				(\$280,532)														

**NOTE: Figures in parenthesis decrease "Amount to be raised by Taxes";
figures without parenthesis increase "Amount to be raised by Taxes".**